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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 TASHKENT 002023

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SUBJECT: GOU CONTINUES TO EXPAND CONTROLLED ACCESS TO U.S.
EMBASSY

Classified By: Poloff Steven Prohaska for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

11. (C) Summary: Embassy personnel, and in particular Ambassador Norland, have been afforded expanded, though carefully controlled, access to GOU officials. Over the past several weeks, Ambassador Norland has met twice with President Karimov, and once each with National Security Service Chairman Inoyatov, Minister of Internal Affairs Matlyubov, two Deputy Prime Ministers, and several city and regional hokims (mayors or governors). This access represents a change from the previous two years. While GOU policy remains carefully scripted, this limited re-engagement is a necessary precursor to a more significant thaw in relations. End summary.

Minister of Higher Education Supports Renewal of Fulbright,
with Caveats

12. (C) Ambassador Norland met on November 16 with Rustam Kosimov, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Higher and Specialized Education. The Ambassador expressed his appreciation that the Uzbeks had agreed to resume the hosting of U.S. Fulbright Scholars. He explained, though, that a two-year lead was necessary and that, contrary to everyone's hopes, we are unlikely to have a scholar in Uzbekistan by the start of the 2008 school year. Kosimov was disappointed, but nonetheless expressed interest in short-term scholars, and Ambassador promised to relay this to the Fulbright program administrators.

13. (C) Kosimov was more hesitant on the issue of school credit conversion. Uzbek students who have studied in the United States experience difficulties converting their credits, and they also run the risk of losing their domestic scholarships. Kosimov explained that the U.S. and Uzbek curricula are different and that the Uzbeks attach great importance to maintaining their own standards. He explained that students wishing to study abroad need to speak to their university director and demonstrate that the program of study is readily transferable. (Comment: Some students are reluctant to speak with their schools before they go, fearing reprisals for applying for foreign study. End comment.) Kosimov avoided addressing the issue of forfeiting domestic

scholarships by studying abroad.

¶4. (C) Kosimov added that it is essential to look at the benefits of various exchange programs. Students studying abroad face serious psychological problems, he explained, and they lose their national identity. He agreed with the Ambassador that the youth are the future, but stated that the schools in Uzbekistan could provide whatever students need. He invited the Ambassador to visit an institute of higher education in Uzbekistan to see for himself the quality of education the students receive. (Comment: Kosimov struck us as a serious education policy professional. End comment.)

Tashkent Hokim Holds High Hopes for City

¶5. (C) On November 13, Ambassador paid a courtesy call on the Hokim (mayor) of the city of Tashkent Abdukahhor Hasanovich Tukhtaev. Tukhtaev gave an overview of Tashkent, emphasizing the quality of the infrastructure and transportation network of the city, its many universities, attention to health care, and Uzbekistan Airways' numerous international destinations. Tukhtaev said that Tashkent purchases "environmentally-friendly" trams from Russia as well as mini-vans, trucks, and cars from Uzbekistan's two automotive factories in Andijon and Samarkand. (Note: The new Russian trams run on electricity. End note.)

¶6. (C) Tukhtaev said that one of the city's goals is to develop the cotton processing industry, which could create thousands of new jobs in Tashkent. He also noted that Tashkent is responsible for 70 percent of Uzbekistan's production of agricultural equipment. Tukhtaev was

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enthusiastic about the upcoming 35-year anniversary of the Tashkent-Seattle sister city relationship and agreed with Ambassador that it could be a good opportunity to expose more Americans to Central Asia.

Andijon Hokim Interested in Cooperation with U.S.

¶7. (C) Ambassador met with the Hokim (governor) of the region of Andijon, Akhmadjon Usmanov, and two of his deputy hokims on November 15. Usmanov said that of the 11 joint ventures with US companies in Andijon, the GM-Uzbekistan auto plant is the largest, and they were planning to increase the production volume to 210,000 in 2011. (Note: GM-Uzbekistan also is the largest car manufacturing company in Central Asia, and its predecessor UzDaewoo produced 140,000 cars in ¶2006. End note.) He said that eleven was a small number of joint ventures, but more importantly, the interest of foreign investors was growing. Usmanov stressed that there were no security problems or problems with the business environment in Andijon.

¶8. (C) Andijon business income accounts for 11.7 percent of Uzbekistan's GDP, Usmanov continued. He said that Andijon occupies an especially important place in the country with regard to cotton and wheat harvesting, and this year it had harvested 390,000 tons of cotton. Usmanov also noted that Andijon was trying to rebuild historical monuments, as Andijon was the hometown of Babur. (Note: An earthquake in 1902 destroyed many of Andijon's monuments. End note.)

¶9. (C) Usmanov shared Ambassador's hopes that cooperation between Andijon and the U.S. would improve following the tragic events of May 2005. He said that he was happy to see the Ambassador visit the province, and hoped this would not be his last visit. Usmanov added that Andijon would be happy to assist the Embassy, and hoped the Embassy could help the province to attract further foreign investment.

Minister for Communication and Information - Media Freedom is a Balancing Act

¶10. (C) Ambassador met with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Communication and Information Abdulla Aripov on November 14. Aripov spoke at length about mass media and internet. On mass media, he noted that 95 percent of Uzbeks receive their information primarily from television and said that he was trying to cajole busy government officials into engaging more with the Uzbek people via mass media. Aripov acknowledged the tremendous benefits of the internet but seemed equally concerned with its potential downsides, noting internet addiction among youth and the proliferation of plagiarism in scholarly works. Aripov was conscious of the needs of private investors but again weighed that against the needs of the state. On the whole, his comments reflected a very sophisticated technical knowledge of communications technology (reflecting his long career in this field and respect for the private sector). His policy outlook took into account the benefits mass media may provide the state, but not necessarily the benefits of freedom of information.

Other Embassy Officers Gaining Access

¶11. (S/NF) Separately, Embassy's Defense Attache Office and GPRO continue to report improved access to counterparts. Political reporting officers have access to working level officials involved in programs of mutual interest, including border security and trafficking in persons, though MFA continues to require Poloffs to officially request meetings via diplomatic note and state the topics they wish to discuss.

Comment: Human Rights Still a Thorny Issue

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¶12. (C) The GOU still clearly is uncomfortable with human rights, election criticism and talk of Andijon, and officials at every level drop well-coordinated hints that continued U.S. insistence could derail our re-engagement. We continue to push back on this, and Ambassador continues to pass this message in all his meetings.

¶13. (SBU) Other meetings with Karimov, Inoyatov, and Matlyubov will be reported septel.

Bio Notes on Kosimov, Tukhtaev, Usmonov, and Aripov

¶14. (SBU) Rustam Sobirovich Kosimov, an ethnic Uzbek, was born on August 30, 1955 in Tashkent. He studied at Tashkent State University's Department of Arab Philology between 1972 and 1978 and worked as an interpreter in Iraq between 1976 and 1978. Kosimov held various positions between 1984 and 1991 in the Faculty of Oriental Studies at Tashkent State University, and was Dean of the Department of History at the Tashkent State Institute of Oriental Studies between 1992 and ¶1994. From 1998 to 2000, he worked in the Academy of State and Public Construction. Kosimov served as a Deputy, then First Deputy Minister of Higher and Special Secondary Education between 2000 and 2004. On May 12, 2004, Kosimov was appointed Minister of Higher and Special Secondary Education. On October 13, 2004, he became Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Higher and Special Secondary Education.

¶15. (SBU) Abdukahhor Hasanovich Tukhtaev, an ethnic Uzbek, was born in 1956 in Tashkent. He has a background in engineering. From 2000 to 2005, he was the First Deputy Hokim of the city of Tashkent. Tukhtaev became Deputy Prime Minister of Uzbekistan on January 3, 2005. Between February 4, 2005 and April 22, 2005, he was Deputy Prime Minister and Chief of the Complex on Communal Services, Transportation,

Capital Construction and Construction Industry in the Cabinet of Ministers. Tukhtaev has served as Hokim of the city of Tashkent since April 22, 2005. Tukhtaev also is a senator.

¶16. (SBU) Akhmadjon Usmanov, an ethnic Uzbek, was born in Jizzakh province. He has served as Hokim of the region of Andijon since October 13, 2006. Between 2004 and October 13, 2006, he served as Chief of the Department of Internal Affairs in Namangan province. From 2003 until 2004, he served as Uzbekistan's Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs.

¶17. (SBU) Abdulla Nigmatovich Aripov, an ethnic Uzbek, was born on May 24, 1961 in Tashkent. He studied at the Tashkent Electrical Technology and Communications Institute between 1978 and 1983. Between 1998 and 2000, Aripov was Head of the Working Group of the Interagency Coordinating Commission for Improvement of Mass Media Activity and Increasing Professionalism in Providing Education. Aripov served as First Deputy Director-General of Uzbekistan's Agency of Postal Services and Telecommunications between 2000 and 2001.

From 2001 to 2002, he was the Director-General of Uzbekistan's Agency of Postal Services and Telecommunications. From May 30, 2002 until January 28, 2005, Aripov served as the Deputy Prime Minister and the Director-General of Uzbekistan's Agency of Communications and Information. On February 4, 2005, President Karimov approved his nomination as Deputy Prime Minister and Director-General of Uzbekistan's Agency for Communications and Information, where he also heads the Complex of Information Systems and TV Communications.

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